

DUNS PLAY FEST



**Bringing Brand New Theatre To The Borders
Business Plan 2025-2028**



BUSINESS PLAN 2025-2028

DunsPlayFest - Bringing Brand New Theatre to the Borders

This Business Plan sets out how we will build on the DPF success since its inception and launch in 2019, to increase participation, reach and audience through community engagement. It includes SMART targets across the festival planning and outcome phases. It also details our approach, timelines, targets and methods of evaluation.

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1. Organisational summary

1.1 Our origins

DunsPlayFest (DPF) is entering its sixth year of community-based theatre festival, celebrating and promoting new writing in the Scottish Borders. Following a successful week-long pilot festival in 2019 organised by a local drama group, the Duns Players, plans for the festival in 2020 had to be shelved due to the Covid pandemic. Our 2021 festival was held online and allowed groups to experiment with script in hand, rehearsed readings and workshop-style productions.

Thanks in part to funding from Creative Scotland, we ran a 9-day DunsPlayFest in early May 2022, drawing on local expertise and considerable volunteer goodwill. Several productions were recorded and presented online later in the month, but it was decided that the online festival did not attract the hoped-for support and would not be repeated in 2023.

DunsPlayFest 23 marked a step change in scope and production. With the appointment of Sara Best as paid Festival Producer, we included both main stage and cabaret items, a daily workshop programme and significantly extended our audience and volunteer opportunities. Funding applications were designed to increase the professionalism of our event and to extend the opportunities offered for talent development across all aspects of theatre production 'from script to stage'.

DPF24 consolidated these developments into our practice. DunsPlayFest is now firmly established in the local and regional community and theatre calendar. Recognised with extended funding from Creative Scotland for DPF25/26, allowing two years for building collaborative partnerships, developing our unique brand and building an experienced production team to propel us forward on strong footings for 27 and 28 onward. We are set to become an established and important part of the yearly cultural arts scene.

Set within the context of place-making in Berwickshire and our strategic partnership with the local development trust, A Heart for Duns (www.aheartforduns.org), we serve a local community of 10,700 residents in mid-Berwickshire and 116,000 in the Scottish Borders. Duns is the historic market town for Berwickshire and offers the largest hall in the county for theatre at the Volunteer Hall.

1.2 Our status

We became a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) on 26 January 2022. Our Board of Trustees, who are the sole *members* of the organisation, bring a range of experience in theatre, direction, creative writing, marketing and administration. It is governed by its constitution. Day-to-day activities are led by an operations group. There are no regular employees.

1.3 Our core purpose

DunsPlayFest fosters, showcases and celebrates new playwriting to inspire the local community as participants on and off stage, as audience and as ambassadors for festival outreach programmes. Our vision is for an annual festival of theatre, dance, storytelling and music that will engage the whole Borders community; attract writers, performers and audiences from further afield and develop the skills and professionalism of local theatre-makers. Our focus is on creative activity around the themes of youth opportunity, wellbeing, the environment, Scottish history and heritage. Our workshops and mentoring programme cover all aspects of theatre-making, including nurturing local talent and exploring career opportunities for young people in the cultural sector.

1.4 Our vision and mission

Our mission is:

To build a strong festival of great theatre for Duns and District to showcase, celebrate and foster new playwriting.

To make theatre accessible for all, breaking down barriers to engagement in Theatre Arts.

To create a supportive environment for early career artists to develop skills and confidence through mentorship and training.

To encourage and nurture early career artists from Berwickshire and beyond, and support local artists.

To be a platform for social and environmental change, mental health and wellbeing.

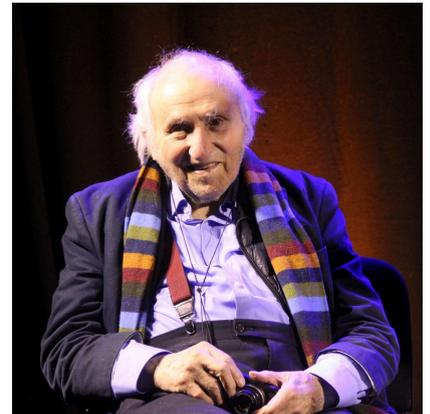
1.5 Our Values

- we celebrate the joy and fulfilment that theatre can bring to individuals and communities
- we understand how theatre making helps release potential, bringing people together to make meaningful connections, strengthens community relationships and wellbeing
- we recognise and nurture the theatrical aspirations of all young people
- we recognise the value of partnership working to achieve our objectives and gain community engagement
- we are a cultural organisation focusing on event delivery and widening participation
- we are an independent, apolitical organisation, not core funded by any one source although we will seek grant funding to support year on year growth and development

1.6 Our People

The Patron of DunsPlayFest is **Richard Demarco**, highly respected Scottish artist, performer and co-founder of Edinburgh's Traverse Theatre. We have been blessed by his wisdom, insights and personal interest in DunsPlayFest. Richard has regularly spoken at the Festival at both our opening party and closing concert, attending where he can to inspire performers - and the Board!

Our Festival Producer, **Sara Best**, leads the Operations Group.



Sara works with us on a contract basis, from day per week during the early autumn, increasing to full time for the duration of the festival. Sara is an established Visual and Performing Artist in her own right, as dancer, performer and workshop leader, as well as bringing extensive experience at designing and delivering theatre arts projects and events, including work at Traquair House, within Historic Environment Scotland events, and the UK wide Music Festival scene as a participatory arts provider. She is well known in the Borders and beyond for her leadership in festival development and delivery. She has a deep commitment to ensuring our Festival Programme is inclusive and not afraid to tackle difficult and challenging themes.



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Our Board of Trustees comprises 10 people with a range of skills in theatre and business management - including Performance, Playwriting and Direction, Creative learning, Marketing, Stage design, Graphic design, Heritage, Law, Finance and Charity governance. Our Operations Group forms the practical heart of Festival planning and organisation.

- Our Festival Director, **John McEwen**, is an actor, playwright, director and the lynchpin of Duns Players. He brings a wealth of experience and connection with local theatres and theatre groups and a passion for the performing arts. Deeply rooted in the Borders with the energy and drive to deliver and grow DunsPlayFest and to make Duns *'THE place to be in May each year'*. He works closely with Sara on the festival programme.



Karen Thomas is the elected Chair of DunsPlayFest Board of Trustees. Karen is an established artist and designer. Starting her working life as a nurse, she has since qualified and worked in the fields of mental health, wellbeing and community education. With a strong belief in equality and social justice, she is committed to ensuring that the festival embodies inclusivity and diversity in every aspect of delivery. As well as applying her creative leadership skills to the project, Karen is responsible for media, communications and venue design.

Our Finance Group work behind the scenes:

Genny Dixon (Treasurer) is an experienced charity trustee, treasurer, project manager and business education consultant, recently retired as founding Treasurer for A Heart for Duns. Responsible for funding, budgets, community and volunteer engagement, ticketing and front of house.



Jerry Ponder is a businessman, company director and founding member and Treasurer of Duns Players, specialising in business conflict resolution. He is responsible for banking, invoicing, receipts and payments, insurance and subscriptions.



Our other Board Members:

Eric Branse-Instone (Heritage, Stage Design), Ramsay Jones (PR, business director, governance), Kevin Purvis (Catering), Lynn Gray (Volunteer liaison)
Angela Georgeson (Safeguarding), Jamie Mein (Vodcast and Social Media)



Our technical team:

Kirk Sim (lighting) and **Marc Inglis** (sound)





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2. Festival Objectives

2.1 Strategic Objectives

The purpose of our engagement activities is to build a stronger festival, delivering a strong spine of great theatre and showcase excellence. New playwriting is the unique and ambitious core.

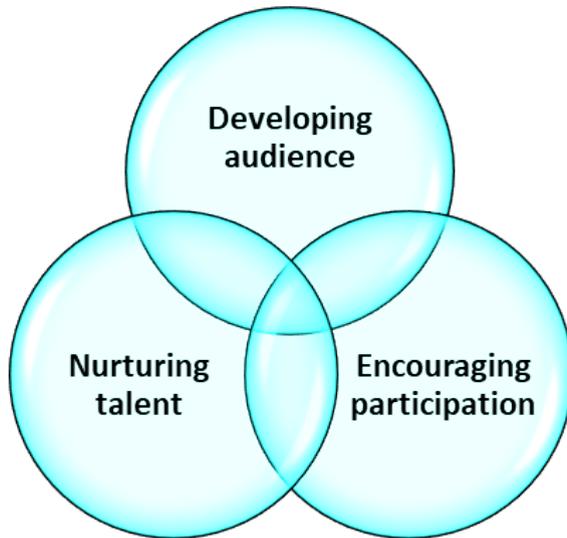
Our key strategic objectives are:

- Showcase, celebrate and foster new playwriting
- Provide equality of access to arts and culture
- Offer opportunities for community engagement and audience development
- Work with professional theatre makers and technicians to
 - build a skilled team of stage, sound and light technicians
 - provide professional development opportunities for local writers and performers
 - inspire young people to follow careers in the arts sector
 - provide work experience opportunities for young people
 - attract touring companies seeking to premier new and experimental works
- Encourage participation by other local community theatre groups
- Encourage volunteering to support the DunsPlayFest and from their positive experience, to engage in other community initiatives
- Widen participation and combat rural isolation through outreach programming to 4 Berwickshire-wide venues within 3 years
- Build lasting relationships with local schools, colleges and universities to encourage active lifelong participation in the arts
- Build lasting artistic and strategic partnerships to help us deliver a successful festival/arts charity year on year, delivering integrated approaches with relevant support agencies
- Secure greater financial stability - increasing earned income through box office, sponsorship and advertising and reducing dependence on grant funding
- Liaise with local Duns and district businesses in retail and hospitality to ensure they benefit from and cater for visitors to the town during the festival

2.2 Our aims

Our aims as an organisation fall into 3 broad areas:

1. Nurturing talent - on- and off-stage; developing skills; mentoring programmes, workshops and discussions
2. Encouraging participation - creative writing; direction; production; performance and volunteering. Embracing diversity and ensuring inclusivity
3. Developing audience - challenging ideas; presenting difficult topics in a new way; cultural awareness; heritage appreciation



At the centre of our aims is the FESTIVAL itself. Each area represents a year round commitment toward the pinnacle of the festival in May each year. The fact they are all interlinked illustrates how achievement of the aim in one area will contribute to achievement across all three aims.

2.3 Our beneficiaries

DunsPlayFest provides a safe and welcoming environment for people of all ages through a programme of theatre and musical performances. We specifically target:

- young people in the 14-25 age group, by offering informal education opportunities through workshop and drama participation and an outlet for their own writing and performance
- socially isolated people: a rural tour and subsidised ticket for remote liver.
- those with mental health issues: offering issue-based drama with post performance opportunities to connect to support agencies, with relaxed performances, and befriending services, with free and low key events and friendly drop in cafes to encourage participation.
- families and young children: family-friendly participatory outdoor activities and indoor story telling events
- adults with an interest in performance arts but lacking the means to access city-based entertainment
- those considering a career in the cultural sector - seeking mentorship to learn about opportunities and work alongside professionals both on and off stage
- visitors from further afield who are interested in theatre and can help us to put Duns on the map
- amateur drama and operatic groups in the Borders
- the small but present multicultural communities within rural Berwickshire
- musicians looking to perform in front of live audiences
- artists from across Scotland who find their way into our programme.

At a time of cost of living crisis, we want to ensure no one is excluded for financial reasons, so all our outdoor events are open and free to all. As is our community engagement - workshop - programme which focuses on new writing and performance skills.

(Concessionary tickets and group discounts are available for all paid events.)

A Heart for Duns enjoy increased hall usage, and their place-making role within the community is strengthened. In addition, local businesses benefit from increased visitor footfall in the town.

2.4 Achievements to date and targets for 2025-8

Objective	Baseline from DunsPlayfest24	2025	2026	2027	2028
Number of performances AHFD	67 drama, dance, spoken word, music	87	87	87	87
Cadet Hall space events	N/A	18	25	30	30
New playwriting	21 new productions	35	40	50	50
Live audience	4495 individual attendances	5500	6500	7750	9000
Ticket sales	2535 including day and festival passes	3000	3500	4000	4500
Professional theatre groups	7 (Firebrand, Tideline Runners, Clare Prenton, Rowanbank Environmental Arts, Shark Bait Theatre Company, Maria McDonnell, Hot Trod Theatre)	10 (Emily Larler, Pauline Lynch, Vivien Reid)	14	15	18
Graduate and Student Companies	4 from Queen Margaret University, Napier University, Edinburgh College (Performing Arts Studio)	10	12	13	14
Performance	101 paid performers	120	120	130	140
Local community theatre groups	4 (Borders Pub Theatre, Duns Players, Duns Operatic Society, Borders Youth Theatre)	4	4	5	5
Community engagement	Family day: 380 Including 150 early years Volunteers: 100+	500 (200)	620 (220)	735 (250)	800 (275)
Venues	Volunteer Hall Duns Castle Duns Cadet Hall Duns Parish Church Duns Park Duns Catholic Church	2 additional village halls Gavinton Longformacus	3 C'burnspath LFM Abbey St B	4 LFM	5
Strategic partnerships	A Heart for Duns Border Youth Theatre Duns Players Wilson's Tales Project Firebrand Made In The Borders DDAOS	Hugo Burge Foundation	The Maltings	tbc	tbc



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Financial	15% costs met from earned income (advertising, friends, box office)	15%	16%	19%	21%

3. Our ambition

Duns is the largest town in Berwickshire, but geographically isolated, with few bus services, no trunk roads or railway. COVID-19 hit the community hard and the cost of living crisis has exacerbated the social deprivation issues. Half of the population live in social housing and there are many families who have moved to Duns from the city. Rich in heritage, and renowned for our warm and friendly welcome and community spirit, we are in a low wage economy, with fuel poverty and poor digital connectivity. In common with many rural areas we have a growing but ageing population. The number of working age people, ages 18 to 64, is expected to decrease by almost 10% between 2020 and 2040, and account for 51% of the total population in 2040, compared to 56.5% in 2020. Many communities, particularly those in rural locations, have poor access to the services they need. (See Appendix C.)

As a result, there are active community groups running a cafe, garden, 'warm space' and social events. Charities help with health and financial burdens and the regional council outcomes include action plans to support and empower communities to be strong, active, resilient and sustainable. DunsPlayFest offers practical ways in which place, community and connectivity can be enhanced. It brings people together in a shared venture which helps to engender community pride and cohesion.

As the Festival gathers momentum, we seek to increase the amount we can raise locally from box office, sponsorship and advertising income, and lessen our dependence on year-on-year grant funding.

DunsPlayFest continues to gather momentum and recognition in the South of Scotland cultural calendar, and we are learning each year and shaping this community led festival into the phenomenon it is!

3.1 Venues

Duns Volunteer Hall is set to remain as our home and primary venue. It is the largest hall in Berwickshire and has great plans for structural improvements over the next 3 years. We have also scheduled performances in the gardens of Duns Castle, the Parish Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Cadet Hall and the Community Centre. In 2025 we are holding family events in Duns Public Park over the Bank Holiday Weekend.



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Whilst most performances are at the Volunteer Hall, we plan to extend the venues used in 2024 and subsequent years to give a 'Fringe' feel about the Festival, involving the whole community.

We have had several requests from the villages in the district to extend the DPF out of town. Many of the villages in rural Berwickshire are very small and have limited or no public transport links, and yet they have strong and vibrant communities and in some cases a newly refurbished village hall. It is our ambition to extend our performance venues to bring brand new theatre to more of these rural venues. In 2025, we included performances in Gavinton and Longformacus Village Halls. In 2026 we hope to include Abbey St Bathans and Cockburnspath and Abbey St Bathans. By 2027 we will also include the coastal communities of Cockburnspath and Coldingham. We are still open to working with owners of the Marchmont estates to create a performance venue at the disused Polwarth Kirk.

In 2025 working with the Lowland and Reserve Cadet Forces, we established the Duns Cadet Hall as a base for young artists, managed by them and featuring work by young and emerging companies. In 2026 this Cadet Hall will host our workshop programme and a full programme of work by early career artists to become established as a Youth Led venue, offering real world experiences to early career professionals under the guidance of our established practitioners. By 2027/28 we hope that this venue is run completely by young people for young people and offers a unique training ground within our busy festival and seeks to enable young people from all backgrounds to access the benefits of on and off stage involvement in theatre arts.

2027/28 Alongside building the programme within the cadet hall engaging early career producers to fundraise and put on their own work in our supported venue. We hope to consolidate our work with Universities and Colleges over these years in order to become part of the programming real world opportunities

3.2 New drama

Our local audiences love plays set in a historical context, plays written by local authors, plays starring well-kent faces, comedies and musicals. We like to stretch their imagination, present new ideas and give them the opportunity to explore themes that are more challenging. We aim to encourage and promote new writing, new drama and new performers. In the last two years we have featured new drama tackling issues around young men's suicide (Andy's Man Club); the Men's Shed; rejection, epilepsy, sudden infant death and bereavement.

DunsPlayFest is growing in reputation and attracting new people to write, perform, direct and produce drama and spoken word. We are receiving a number of submissions from those with new work they would like to bring to Duns. We understand the time and energy that goes into preparing every minute of our programme and work hard to strike a balance, to create a festival that challenges and inspires, enables and engages!

In 2025 we offered a Writer-in-Residence programme in conjunction with the Hugo Burge Foundation (<https://www.hugoburgefoundation.org/>) and were overwhelmed by the number and quality of applicants. At this stage we can only afford a single place but hope to expand this programme in the future. It is hugely encouraging to be able to support former pupils of Duns schools embarking on their career in the performing arts and to welcome them back to our stage as writers, producers and performers.

In 2026 our plan will include an updated process for inviting and screening new scripts, which we will hone for future years. New collaborations will include early career production companies with writers callouts to their networks. Collaborations with Creative Hub, a membership network for Writers initiated by Lisa Nichol, alongside continual support and callouts to writers from our locale and expanding network of early career producers across the Borders and Beyond.



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In 2027 we hope to establish our own writer's residency, and we hope to increase the multi-cultural diversity of our festival in the Borders to engage a fuller spectrum of our rural community. Duns has a strong historical connection with Poland and a significant Polish population. In collaboration with the Polish Consulate in Edinburgh, we will work to develop the international nature of the festival by working with the local twinning association to feature relevant and engaging content for their members.

From 2028 as our established venues consolidate we hope to be able to support a widening group of artists to bring their new writing to our stages to an engaged and sympathetic audience.

3.3 Audience development

We have been delighted in the last two years to welcome increasing numbers of people from further afield as well as growing our local following. We will focus on audience research, market analysis and competitive analysis to understand the gaps and possibilities for growth. Brand stability and awareness, new partnerships, targeted marketing are all important.

Whilst numbers and reach are of necessity the most important measures of our success, our aim is also to develop our audiences. Key aspects include audience research, segmentation, community outreach, accessible programming, digital marketing, and fostering a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere, regardless of background or ability.

Over the next 3 years we will continue to improve our:

- understanding of audience segmentation based on factors like age, income, location, cultural background, and theatre experience level
- use of social media platforms to reach diverse audiences, share show information, and engage with potential patrons.
- collaboration with local organizations, schools, community centres, and businesses
- provision of options for people with disabilities, including audio description, BSL interpretation, sensory-friendly performances, theatre buddy services and wheelchair accessible seating
- volunteer opportunities and appreciation
- participation in local events and initiatives to build relationships and raise awareness
- website as the source of show information and tickets
- offering of interactive pre-show activities, post-show discussions and artist meet-and-greets
- educational programs for students and young audiences.

To build capacity - and thus audience numbers and sustainability - we need to secure grant funding to develop our marketing and creative engagement programmes.

3.4 Professionalism

It is of critical importance to us to be able to offer a professional environment to our performers. We employ a professional festival producer; sound and light engineers to lead our technical team; experienced stage managers and crew and ensure that all our staff work to the highest standards. As we train up our interns through working alongside our professionals, we can offer valuable work experience to them to plan and manage the technical requirements of some of our smaller venues. Again, to build capacity, we need to secure grant funding to offer our Festival Producer an extended contract and thus extend our planning cycle.

As a Board of Trustees we strive for continuous improvement. We work hard to present a professional image, including our policy framework, online presence, festival management and ticketing processes.



4. Finance

The DunsPlayFest budget is set by the Operations Group and approved by the Trustees. Finances are managed by the Treasurer, with day-to-day support from the Finance Officer, Chair and Festival Producer.

The Producer reports weekly to the Operations Group, to provide budget spend, income and balances and additional narrative based on expected and actual movement of funds.

Trustees are aware of their fiduciary responsibilities and duties as advised by OSCR. Annual Receipts and Payments accounts are prepared by the Treasurer and independently inspected. A full audit is not legally required yet as we are a small charity with annual turnover under the audit threshold.

It is our policy to pay all professionals at professional rates (Equity/ITC) and to offer expenses for travel and subsistence where required.

The financial objectives include

- identifying longer-term multi-year grant opportunities that will allow earlier planning
- funding year-round staffing appointments for the Festival Producer, marketing and creative engagement
- offering paid internships
- ensuring a positive cash flow from any trading operations
- attracting new business sponsors and advertising revenue
- increasing the proportion of costs met from earned income (increasing audience numbers)
- reduce cash handling at events by using online ticketing and banking

4.1 Why we seek grant funding

DunsPlayFest currently has no core funding to enable long term planning. It survives on a very small amount of external funding, all of which is time limited and with end dates.

Our costs fall under 6 main headings:

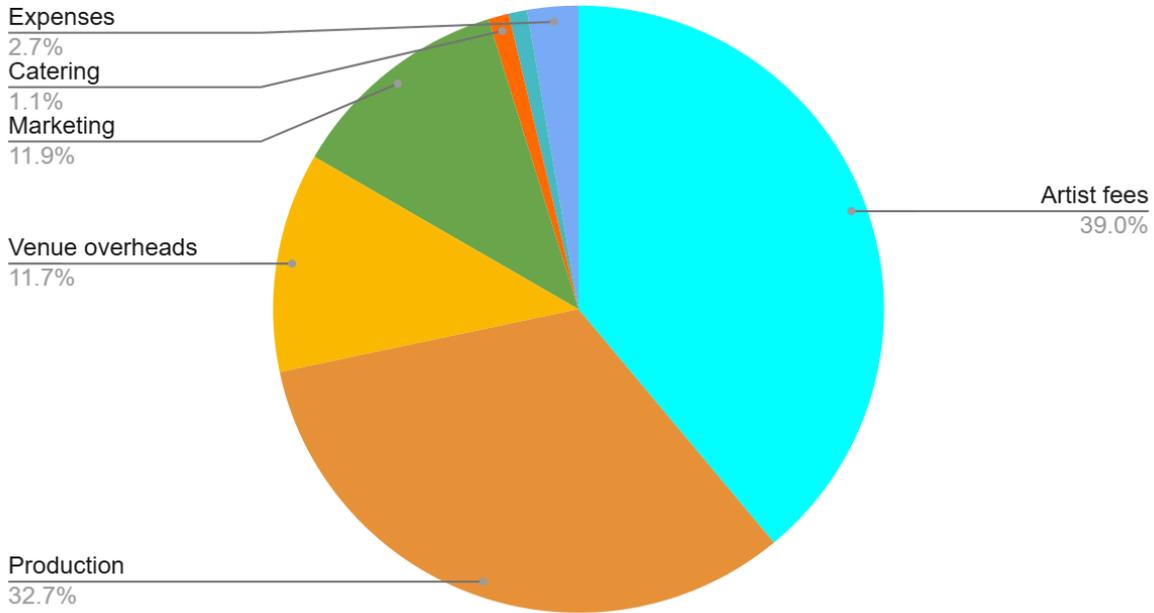
Artistic costs

We contract with professional drama groups (at Equity/ITC rates) both to attract audiences and to raise the quality and reach of the overall festival. We also need to pay expenses for local Borders amateur companies to participate, for example: Borders Youth Theatre and Borders Pub Theatre.

We employ a Festival Producer to bring everything together and be the face of the festival for all our performers and visitors. The Producer is responsible for appointing creative artists, planning the programme, agreeing payment rates and terms and preparing contracts for creative artists (subject to agreement with the Festival Director and Board of Trustees).

Our performances include drama, dance, spoken word, music and family entertainment. In 2025, our estimated artistic costs are £32,470, representing 39% of the total budget.

DPF25 Budget



Workshops

We provide training and support to local amateurs, focusing on working with schools and young people. We have been very successful in building ongoing relationships with groups such as the Playwrights Studio Scotland and Scottish Storytellers. We work closely with local schools, colleges and universities including the University of Edinburgh, Napier University, Heriot Watt University, Borders College and Queen Margaret’s University. Our paid internship programme links young people seeking career opportunities in the creative arts with theatre-making professionals.

Intern Programme

In 2025 we employed 7 young people for the duration of the festival, during which they gained valuable experience in sound and lighting or stage management. This is part of an ongoing commitment to supporting careers into the Theatre Industry. We hope to attract a diverse group of young people, from secondary and tertiary education establishments- such as Queen Margaret Uni, Edinburgh College, from local schools and youth groups as well as the home education community.

In 2026 we aim to offer 7 intern posts - 3 Junior and 4 Senior, and 4 Junior crew roles to early career theatre makers. We hope to offer progressive and positive pathways into careers in theatre.

2027 - 2028 we hope that this structure will enable the smooth running of the festival under the mentorship of our professional technicians. and that we will be able to help the youth led elements of our project to continue to grow.

Venue hire

Our primary venue, the Volunteer Hall in Duns, offers a large unfurnished hall with 3 small dressing rooms, the Hope Room for meetings of up to 10 people and the Hay Hut which can offer a rehearsal space. We transform the main hall into a flexible space which can offer a ‘black box’ fixed theatre stage area, in-the-round



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performances, and a small stage for cabaret, solo musicians, discussions etc. We decorate the hall to create a 'wow factor' as people come into the Festival space. We are fortunate that A Heart for Duns provides a significant 50% discount for hall hire (not recorded in our published Receipts and Payments accounts), recognising the shared objectives for the community.

Other venues we will be using in the town in 2025 include the Southfield Centre, Parish Church Hall, LRFA Cadet Hall, Duns Castle Grounds and Duns Public Park.

In 2024 our venue overheads comprised 11.7% of the total. Having made significant initial investment in drapes and wall hangings which can be used in different ways in future festivals, we aim to reduce this proportion to below 8%. Working with the members of Duns Mens' Shed we now have a magnificent theatre facade for the Volunteer Hall which can be used in future years. Students from Berwickshire High School have been commissioned to create bar tables and a 'box office' in 2025.



Technical

We aim to offer a professional quality production environment for our visiting and local theatre makers. This involves hiring in sound and light equipment and employing experienced technicians. We work with a paid Sound Engineer, a Lighting Technician and a Stage Manager. Our longer term ambition is to build a local team of skilled volunteers to support the Festival.

For 2025 we have recruited 7 young people, some in education, others not, on our intern programme. 3 junior interns have also been engaged. 2026-28 we plan to consolidate this training programme, building upon our mentorship and training opportunities

We are not intending to purchase our own sound or lighting equipment in the short term, due to problems of storage and ongoing costs of maintenance and renewals.

Marketing and promotion

Without audiences, there would be no Festival! We pride ourselves on a professional, informative website (www.dunsplayfest.org.uk) and festival programme. Sharing via our active social media network and mailing list is relatively low cost but highly effective activity. Our reach extends across the Borders and Northumberland and includes Edinburgh arts venues. Our ambition is to bring a professional social media marketing consultant on board.

Our chosen ticketing partner, CitizenTicket (www.citizenticket.com) assists with marketing through their extensive client base.

Overheads and administration

Whilst overheads are cut to the quick, we need to ensure that we hold the necessary insurance and licences. We rely heavily on our volunteers who give freely of their time and skills, and our artists generously keep travel and subsistence expenses to a minimum.



4.2 Sources of income

Income comes from 2 sources, grant funding and earned income. The main potential for earned income is

- box office ticket income
- business sponsors
- programme advertising
- merchandising (badges, tee-shirts, tote bags)

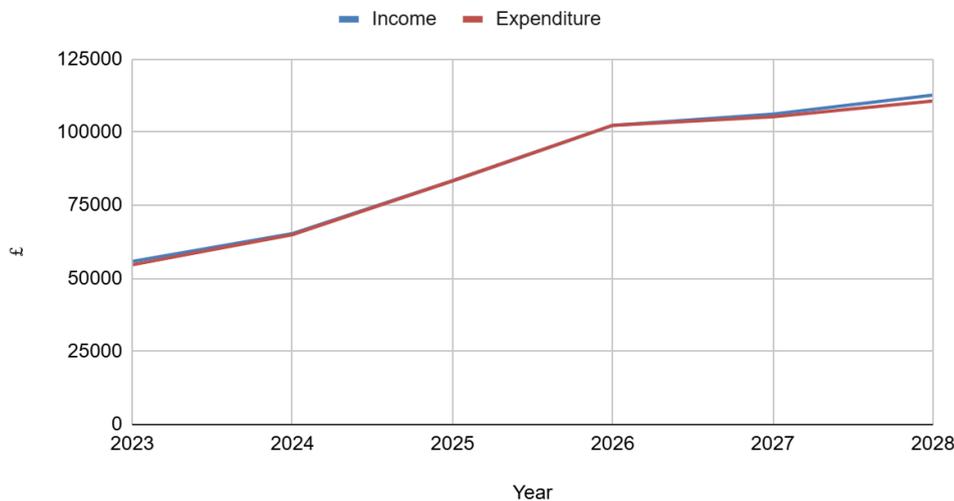
4.3 Income and expenditure

At incorporation in January 2022, DunsPlayFest had a zero balance. At the end of the festival in 2022, the unrestricted balance had increased to £1673 in the year end accounts to 30 September 2022.

The budget for the 2023 festival was increased following feedback from participants. Artistic creative costs had risen to £21,150 and technical costs, including staffing, had increased to £16,315. A professional bid writer was used to identify potential funding partners and prepare initial applications.

We have recorded steady growth in income and expenditure year on year and work to a balanced budget for future years. 2025 and 2026 represent a period of assured growth thanks to extended funding from Creative Scotland which secures the additional cost of creative artists. 2027 and 2028 show continued increase but at a smaller rate reflecting the anticipated reduction in national grant funding available.

DunsPlayFest 2022-8





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2025 budget and progress on securing funding

Source	Actual (£) to date 2025	Item	2025 Budget (£)
Brought forward	4,210	Artist fees	32,470
Creative Scotland Extended Fund*	60,000	Production	27,275
Blackhill Community Wind Farm	5,200	Venue overheads	9,750
The Hugo Burge Foundation	2,500	Marketing	9,880
Fallago Rig Windfarm**	5,000	Catering	910
Earned income (advance sales)	1,544	Administration	815
Sponsorship and donations	1,300	Expenses	2,255
Sub-Total (excluding reserves)	75,544		
Unsecured	7,811		
Sub-Total	83,355	Total	83,355

* Funding from Creative Scotland of £100,000 covers the period ending 31 May 2026. Since 90% of this has already been received, the risk of any shortfall in box office receipts has been mitigated. We intend to reserve significant funds towards DPF26 and hope to build up our charity reserves to a minimum of £5000.

** This is the final instalment of 3 year funding to support technical costs and intern programme.



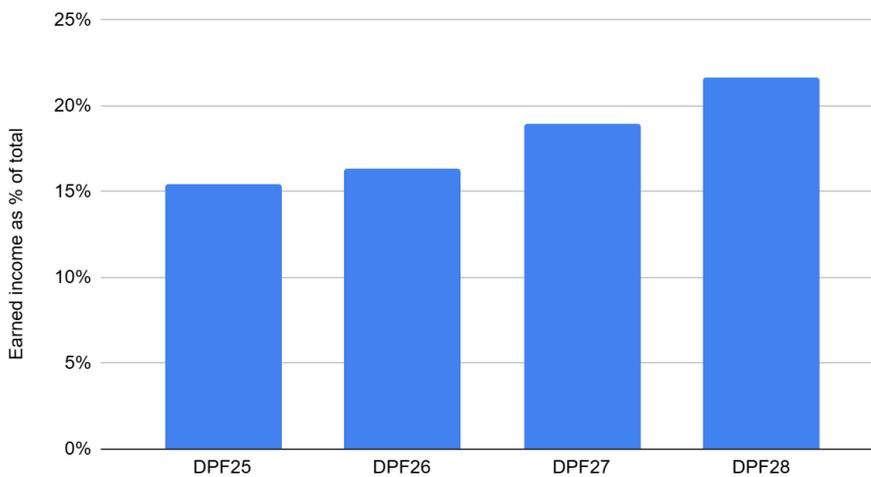
BUSINESS PLAN 2025-2028

DunsPlayFest - Bringing Brand New Theatre to the Borders

Budget for 2026-2028

SUMMARY							
	1/8/25 to 31/07/26	1/8/26 to 31/07/27	1/8/27 to 31/7/28		1/8/25 to 31/07/26	1/8/26 to 31/07/27	1/8/27 to 31/7/28
INCOME				EXPENDITURE			
Earned income	16,715	20,660	25,500	Artist fees	40,000	43,175	44,000
Donations and sponsorship	6,960	5,000	18,000	Production	30,275	38,500	40,000
Creative Scotland Funding	44,000	50,000		Venue overheads	10,640	7,220	7,500
Other Grants	34,680	31,750	74,000	Marketing	11,170	6,940	14,000
				Catering	1,000	1,445	1,000
				Administration	830	2,025	1,000
				Expenses	2,440	1,360	3,000
				Intern programme	6000	7,245	7000
TOTAL	102,355	1 , 0	117,500	TOTAL	102,355	1 , 0	117,500
Earned income as % of total	16%	15%	22%				

Earned income as % of total





4.4 Funding strategy

How will we build up funds in time to underpin programme planning?

As DunsPlayFest grows year on year, costs will also significantly increase. In common with many festivals around the country, securing grant funding will remain a critical success factor. We understand the need for a whole-year planning cycle and ideally a funding strategy that starts 18 months in advance!

Earned box office income

Our target is to generate increased earned income until we cover a minimum of 25% of all costs from box office receipts within 5 years. How can this be achieved?

1. Spread the focus for earned fund-raising to a wider geographic community (for example, attracting audiences from further afield, building new partnerships with other Border festivals)
2. Spread the fund-raising across the year (for example by holding events during the autumn and spring)
3. Set up a scheme for Friends/Patrons of DunsPlayFest in raising money throughout the year (for example, creating a 200 Club with monthly draw)
4. Making tickets available earlier in the season and providing attractive incentives such as 'early bird' pricing
5. Targeted advertising to specialist groups and organisations for specific drama events
6. Raise ticket costs and/or pass on the cost of ticketing to the customer
7. Improve and increase marketing communications with professional input
8. Encourage creative artists to seek funding in their own right as they become established

Grant funding

1. Start the funding application cycle as soon as the previous festival has been evaluated
2. Identify and apply for multi-year funding to cover core costs
3. Approach small local funders for specific items
4. Build up a good relationship with funding bodies through regular communications

Contingency plans if we fail to meet income targets in years 2 and 3

1. Restrict any capital expenditure or additional costs on hall decor
2. Continue to contract with part-time staff as funds allow
3. Restrict the number and scope of paid performers - for example by including more rehearsed readings or script-in-hand work

Reducing expenditure

1. Increased focus on local talent and amateur groups
2. Train up our volunteers to take on roles that are currently paid (for example, technical, stage management, set design etc)
3. Consider buying our own professional quality lighting systems (in partnership with Duns Players) to replace the cost of hiring sound systems
4. Reduce venue costs by working closely with stakeholders and volunteers
5. Gradually build up our own staging and resources (blacks, drapes, box office accessories)

It is our policy to pay all artists and staff at advised rates from Equity/ITC so pay reduction is not an option.



5. Community Engagement

How will we build trust within the community and grow DPF as an event for the whole community to celebrate and own – critical for growth in future years?

5.1 Key messages

What are the key messages that we want to share with our community?

DunsPlayFest is entering its sixth year, and is now **Bringing Brand New Theatre to the Borders**.

DunsPlayFest is opening opportunities for developing talent in theatre and in production skills

DunsPlayFest is open to all and offers something for all the family and all of the segments of the community.

Each day in the programme focuses on a different segment including A day for Duns, Family day, Wellbeing, Environment, Scottish history, Heritage and Youth.

DunsPlayFest is providing access to quality performances locally. Experience the quality without the cost of travel.

DunsPlayFest provides a springboard for new productions to gain an early audience.

DunsPlayFest promises enjoyment, entertainment and fun.

Be proud of our town and district and together let's put Duns on the map!

5.2 Elements of marketing and communications plan

E-newsletters

- Update mailing list and permissions
- Audience survey and follow-up
- Mailing to artists/event organisers
- Monthly emails to include batches of events, and news that will feed through to the Website and social media.
- Festival dates, ticketing information, friends scheme, dates of future newsletters and complete programme launch.

Website

- Regular website update
- Programme of blogs, podcasts and vodcasts
- Event details on What's On pages as confirmed
- Ticket/passes set up through CitizenTicket with detailed event information

Social Media

- Regular postings to Facebook and Instagram
- Following and sharing of performer pages
- Local Border towns community Facebook pages
- Regular story lines built illustrating core values, introducing team members, showcasing work

PR Media

- Announcement of dates highlighting shows that have been confirmed.



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- Regular news stories
- Press Launch Borders/Edinburgh

Festival printed materials

- A6 Marketing Cards
- Event posters/signs and programmes
- Posters - shops, boards and arts venues
- Roadside signs around the Borders
- At a glance printed programme summary in trifold brochure
- Full printed programme with festival printing partners Fantasy
- Show flyers for in house promotional work
- Printed event audience survey

Miscellaneous advertising and promotional opportunities

- Advertise in the Traverse Theatre, Melrose Wynd, Berwick Maltings and other local theatre programmes
- Creative Arts Business Network promote through CABN website, weekly e-bulletins and Social Media
- Playwrights Studio, Scotland Arts organisation exclusively dedicated to the long-term support, development and promotion of Scotland's playwrights. Networking and promotion on their website of emerging playwrights at festival
- Working through advocates to help promote DPF such as stakeholders and funders and national bodies
- LiveBorders networking promotion of festival
- NODA The National Operatic and Dramatic Association charity for amateur theatre societies listings
- VISITSCOTLAND website listings: Whats On attractions - Outdoor Activities - Events & Festivals
- National Theatre of Scotland listings website What's On section
- South of Scotland Enterprises (SOSE)
- South of Scotland Destination Alliance (SSDA)

and

Word of mouth - it has such impact in Duns and the rural areas of mid-Berwickshire

5.3 SMART engagement plan with outcomes

Purpose	Method	2025 target
<i>Information</i>	Appendix 1 outlines the key elements of our planning timeline. Ultimately success is determined by audience numbers	Audience: 6,000 Website visitors: 3,000 Newsletter circulation: 2000 Social media reach: 10,000
<i>Consultation</i>	Feedback from each event from audience and performers End of festival audience survey from 2024 One-on-one meetings with stakeholders Consultation with local drama and creative writing groups and other partners	Initial stakeholder meetings completed by end of 2024
<i>Collaboration</i>	Strengthening partnerships with A Heart for Duns, local primary and secondary schools, Duns Players and Duns Amateur Operatic Society. Close working with local charities and those supporting mental health Catering provision by local Fairshare businesses Working with Hugo Burge Foundation, other community and professional theatres and drama groups	Establish 'writer in residence' programme in association with the Hugo Burge Foundation. ParentSpace, BAVS and Interest Link.
<i>Participation</i>	We will arrange specific workshops for children, young people, writers, performers, and technicians. Amateur groups will work alongside professionals to encourage engagement and skills development.	Number of performances: 80+ Participants: 220 New drama productions: 35
<i>Empowering</i>	Individuals: via the Hugo Burge Award; leading workshops; developing new skills through workshops, working alongside professionals and performing on stage Performances by local school pupils at opening event Positive impact on volunteers through their contribution	Match or exceed number of volunteers, participants in learning and outreach groups, and sessions aimed at children and young people. Number of youth workshops: 3 Participants: 40 Number of Professional Development workshops: 8 Participants: 40

5.4 Stakeholders

How will we identify and meet with our stakeholders to understand their needs and address any concerns they raise?

Who	Description	Responsibility	Risk
Duns Players	Key source of local writers, directors and performers	John McEwen (Festival Director and Chair of DPs)	Critical
A Heart for Duns (AHFD)	Venue Shared marketing and potential box office provision Printed Newsletter reach to 1800 homes in local community	Karen Thomas (Trustee of DPF and AHFD) Sara Best (Festival Producer) Genny Dixon (newsletter editor)	Critical
Funding bodies	Creative Scotland Local Windfarms Charitable Trusts and Foundations	Genny Dixon (Treasurer) Board of Trustees	Critical
SBC Live Borders	Council – licensing, permissions for outdoor venues Booking touring companies and extending Festival venues to spaces managed by LiveBorders	Festival Producer	High
Community Councils	Rural programme; venues; local marketing and discounted ticketing for residents	Genny Dixon John McEwen	High
Community	School and community theatre and creative writing groups to access and benefit from working with professional performers, planners and stage crew	Festival Producer	High
DDAOS (Duns and District Amateur Operatic Society)	Key source of performers, word of mouth support and contacts	Festival Producer and Genny Dixon (Trustee and former President of DDAOS)	High
Professional theatre companies	Bringing new productions to the festival and sharing expertise with the DPF community Building opportunities for public participation in theatre rather than a festival to support professional companies	John McEwen (Festival Director)	High
The Maltings (Berwick-upon-Tweed)	Local theatre venue (18 miles away) Share programme, marketing	Festival Producer	High
Queen Margaret's University/Napier/Edinburgh/	Drama department - potential for working with drama students	Festival Producer	High



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Borders College	Project opportunities for Marketing and Catering students	Festival Producer Kevin Purvis (Catering)	High
CitizenTicket	Ticketing agent	Genny Dixon (Treasurer)	High
Web services and social media providers	Programme, website and community awareness	Board	High
Hugo Burge Foundation	Local cultural hub Writer in residence programme	Festival Director Festival Producer	Medium
ParentSpace and Interest Link	Charity working with DPF to increase accessibility, equality and diversity	Karen Thomas (Chair)	Medium
Edinburgh-based arts organisations	Raise awareness and build audience interest	Festival Producer	Medium
Borders Talking Newspaper	Sound recordings of selected shows to share with BTN circulation of 250 blind and partially sighted listeners	Festival Producer	Medium
Berwickshire High School Duns Primary School	School workshops to encourage participation, new writing, youth involvement and to promote equality, diversity and inclusion	Festival Producer	Medium
Duns hotels, cafes and caterers	Provision of cafe on site for lunchtime and evening meals	Board	Medium
Local Artists	Theatre and venue design	Karen Thomas & Festival Producer	Low
Greener Duns	Ensuring environmental awareness and sustainability	Karen Thomas (Chair)	Low



APPENDIX A - PLANNING TIMELINES

Planning is led by:

- Festival Producer and Operations Group, working with specialist groups for finance, catering, marketing and programming
- Bi-monthly meetings of Board of Trustees
- Each of the above groups may also arrange one off and ad hoc meetings

July

- Evaluation meeting for May festival
- Discussion of lessons learned and outline of plans for the following year
- Develop and initialise detailed marketing plan and timeline for the following festival year to include PR, web communications, newsletter, blogs, pod/vodcasts, social and printed media
- Book venue for the following year
- Recruit organising committee

August

- Embark on funding applications.
- Contact potential sponsors and other interested businesses.
- Contact previous contributors to DunsPlayFest
- Contact local theatre companies who might wish to contribute and investigate programme options.

September – December

- Prepare a detailed budget – begin fundraising campaign. Appoint a fundraiser.
- Recruit Festival Producer
- Meetings with stakeholders, confirm funding sources and budget
- Plan outline Festival programme and schedule
- Secure catering services
- Secure additional venues
- Ongoing discussions with Professional Theatre companies and Workshop facilitators
- Meet Playwrights Studio and LIVE Borders to discuss plan
- Get synopses etc from contributors via marketing questionnaires

January:

- Confirm ticket pricing and routes to market
- Meet with schools to plan pupil activities leading up to DunsPlayfest and involvement in the Festival week
- Contract local businesses re programme advertising
- Meet with other venue managers to confirm outreach programme
- Meet with Volunteer Hall to update on Programme details and hall decoration
- Confirm nomination and selection process for Marchmont Makers Award

February

- Finalise arrangements for school workshops and commence programme
- Confirm professional companies taking part and enter into contract where required



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- Deadline for submission of items to programme
- Confirm arrangements and licensing for outdoor venues
- Discuss rehearsal timing, including technical and dress rehearsal with participating productions. Schedule stage time and rehearsal spaces where required
- Confirm catering times and costs
- Meet with A Heart for Duns to discuss stage requirements, set up, backstage requirements
- Book dates for following year
- Confirm venue design plans with Allanbank Arts
- Appoint stage manager, sound and lighting technicians
- Finalise programme, performance and rehearsal timings
- AGM and volunteers evening to launch DPF

March

- Confirm accommodation and travel arrangements for student companies and opening speaker(s)
- Plan arrangements for opening party and closing concert
- Review policies and risk assessment
- Update PVGs as required

April

- Finalise all arrangements
- Train front of house team and other volunteers as required
- Decorate hall and other venues
- Focus on marketing and ticket sales

First week of May

DUNSPRAYFEST

May

- Audience survey and evaluation
- Gather stakeholder and performing company feedback
- Thanks to sponsors, volunteers, artists, musicians, teachers etc
- Complete evaluation and end of project reports for funding bodies
- Trustee meeting – debrief
- Crew, Volunteer and Performer meetings - debrief

June

- Audience analysis and segmentation
- Provisional approach to new theatre companies

APPENDIX B - Feedback from DPF2024

Borders Youth Theatre Director and workshop Leader Oli Bisset said:

The young folk particularly enjoyed how professional they were made to feel by all the members of the team; from the way they were greeted by Sara at the door, to the way the tech team were with them to the way they were respected by the audience.

Some specific notes from each show.

Mindful: Lewis Teckham and I were absolutely delighted with the performance. The cast were very strong and the show was extremely powerful. It was an honour to premiere this show at the playfest; Lewis was very proud and happy.

Mark and the tech team did a superb job with quite a complex range of sounds and video. Not only were they professional and efficient they were also friendly and welcoming. Same goes for Eilidh and Beatrice (DOF interns); they were professional, friendly and always positive.

Thanks for organising the (wheelchair) ramps, they were perfect. Our dressing room was ideal and allowed us to have a brief rehearsal before show time.

Ear Candy: The young folk had a brilliant time performing their work on the cabaret stage and the audience was really engaged. It was such a friendly and supportive venue; the tech team was amazing, thanks Otto and James. Nothing was too much for the amazing staff at the PlayFest and every single person, from volunteer to festival organiser, was friendly, helpful and professional.

Particular thanks to you Sara for all your help and positive attitude.

I thought the venue looked sensational this year. Somehow you manage to turn a boring underused space into the most happening place in the Borders (if not Scotland). The stage was great and the tech is top notch.

Karen Anderson from BYT ran a series of workshops and performances at our Family Day at Duns Castle, as well as creating work with a mixed company of young people and professional performers. The workshops were well attended and the performances had full houses at the castle.



Quote from a

12-year-old audience member:

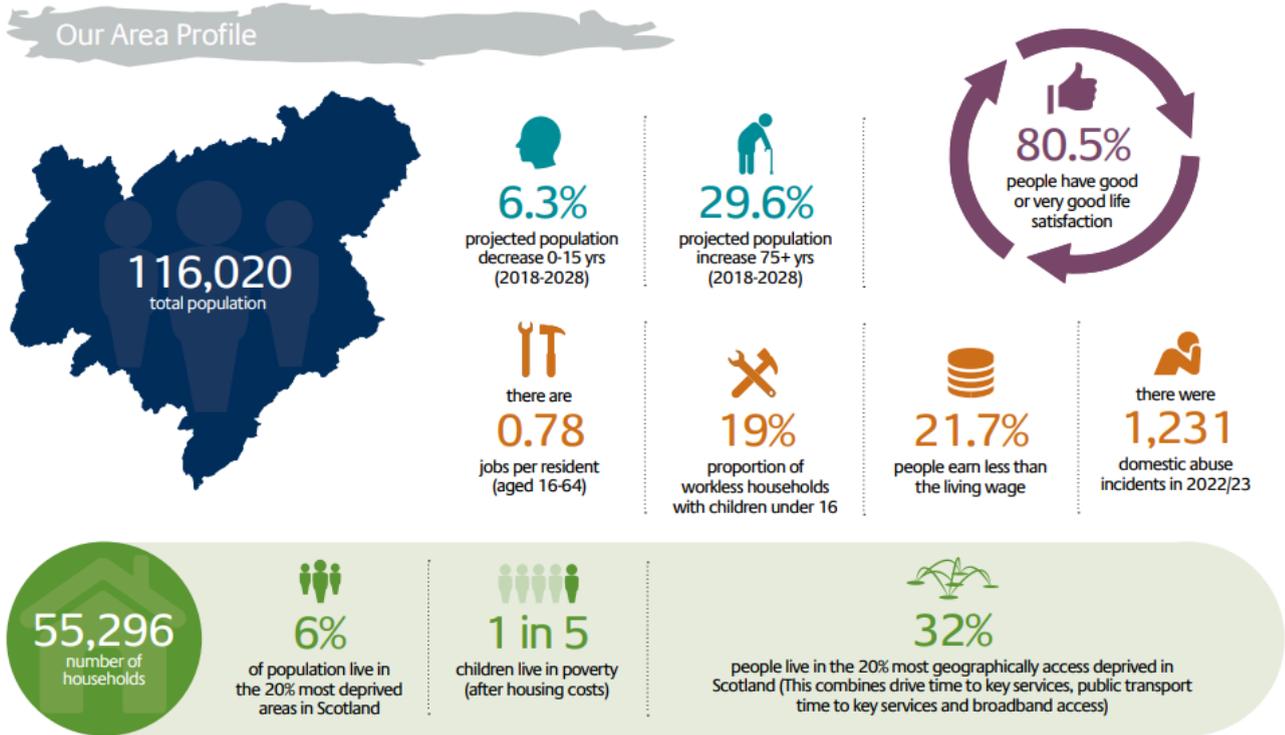
"It is the best piece of visual media I have ever seen"

The audience, young and old, expressed enjoyment of the show and the young people performed to their abilities extremely well.

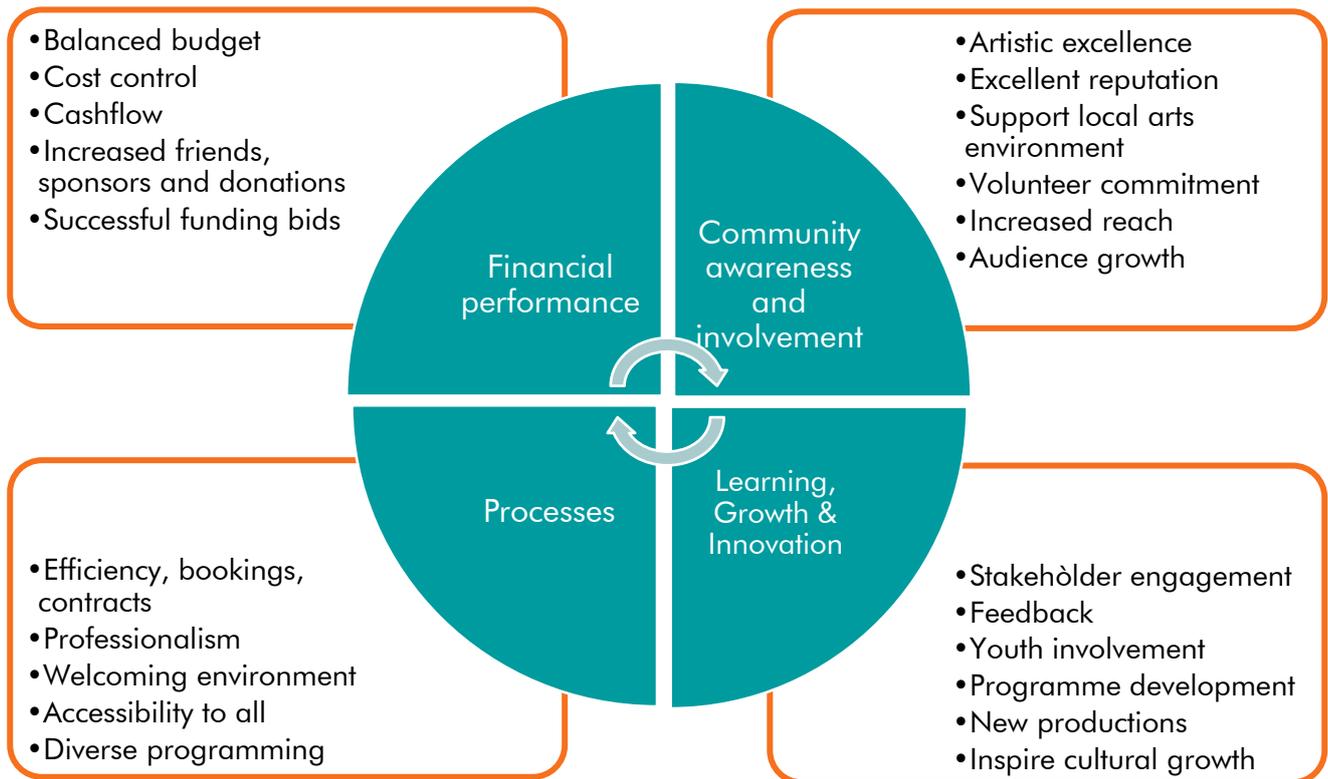
An Independent review from D&G based artist and journalist Stacie Amelie can be read [HERE](#) and from London based writer [Report: DunsPlayFest, Duns, 2-10.05.25](#)

APPENDIX C - Area Profile

What we know about the Scottish Borders



APPENDIX D. Results of independent evaluation and strategic planning exercise June 2025



Financial performance

What we want from funding sources:

- Longer-term funding commitments of three years or more.
- Flexible, unrestricted core funding to ensure security, effective planning, and good governance.
- Sustainable funding that considers inflationary increases and covers full operating costs.
- Streamlined, accessible, and consistent funding application and reporting processes.
- Timely processing of applications and payments.

What funders want:

- What funders want
- Clear strategic plan
- Good governance, leadership and management
- Robust planning and evaluation process
- Measurable Impact and outcomes

Operational Planning

Improved Efficiency: By providing a clear roadmap for actions, operational planning helps the team work more efficiently and effectively

Enhanced Accountability: Clear goals and performance indicators make it easier to track progress and hold individuals and teams accountable

Better Resource Management: By outlining resource needs, operational plans help you to allocate resources more effectively

Increased Success: A well-developed operational plan increases the likelihood of achieving strategic goals and achieving sustainability

Results of SWOT Analysis



Actions agreed:

1. Renew efforts to involve National Press
2. Create and distribute Promotional Video/Show Reel
3. Record Interviews and distribute via social media
4. Contact schools and increase involvement of young people
5. Create an award scheme for young writers
6. Contact BHA for use of Car Park for parking for evening performances